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ABSTRACT

Survey and observational research on educational lobbying organizations in the Pennsylvania state legislature yielded both data on influence processes and a set of seven guidelines for educational lobbyists. A survey of Pennsylvania legislators at the 1973-74 session examined their attitudes about education bills, educational lobbies and their influence, effective lobbying characteristics, and the amount of influence exerted by other legislators, legislative staffs, and official party policies. The survey results and an analysis of legislative voting patterns provided the basis for the first five guidelines for educational lobbyists, including keeping political lobbying and support nonpartisan; lobbying the chairpersons, members, and staff of the education and appropriations committees; working continuously with the lobby's grassroots constituencies; and supplying accurate information. Participant observation research from 1979 through 1981 on the teachers' lobby, the Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA), and the management lobby, the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA), revealed how the PSEA lost power to the PASA by violating the five guidelines. The research also provided two further lobbying principles: lobbying should be continuous instead of concentrated on just one bill, and lobbying should be quiet and not boastful. (RW)

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Education Lobbies in the Pennsylvania State Legislature

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Education Lobbies in the Pennsylvania State Legislature

Introduction

Like other areas of politics, education in influenced by federal, state, and local political systems. Since the mid 1960s, the trend in education has been toward a more central role at the state level (Iannaccone, 1967 and Campbell and Mazzoni, 1976). This has been due to the assertiveness of the state legislatures and the state departments of education (aided by federal grants to state departments of education) as well as the retreat of local school boards as they attempted to place greater fiscal responsibility at the state and federal levels.

More recently, under Mr. Reagan's "New Federalism", the federal government is retreating from, if not surrendering completely, federal prominence in influencing public education as established in the 1960s. The planned dismantlement of the Department of Education, the block grant concept with a 20% rake off to state departments of education, the overall reduction in federal funding, and the decision not to vigorously pursue federal court action in education all make the federal role less prominent at least for the moment.

Add to this the general economy and the disparity in the way this affects specific local governments and one is forced to the conclusion that the state role in the politics of education is increasingly pervasive. As long as the federal government avoids actively participating in funding or influencing education and local economics are greatly disparate and largely weak, the focus of obtaining funding for public education will fall on the state legislatures. Under such conditions, lobbying state legislatures will be of paramount importance to those interested in quality public education.

Framework of the Study

A basic premise of this paper, supported by the preponderance of data collected by the pluralist school in political science, suggests that there is a power inequity among groups and individuals in American democracy, but that these inequities are disbursed (Dahl, 1961 and Summerfield, 1974). Said more simply, no single person or group holds all the power and usually some configuration or coalition of groups is required to influence legislative or executive action in important political decisions.

Perhaps induced by the work of Masters, Salisbury, and Eliot (1964), and followed by the work of Milstein and Jennings (1973), and the Campbell and Mazzoni study (1976), the operation of state legislatures as they deal with education bills has become a major thrust in the politics of education field. Two significant foci of this study are: (1) the process of making these legislative decisions, and perhaps more importantly, (2) how that process is influenced.

If power is unequally distributed, if coalitions shift, if a group's investments and, therefore, interests in using their power in any instance vary, it appears clear that legislative decisions will tend to enhance the position and goals of one segment of society as opposed to another. The vast majority of the literature from Hollingshead(1949), to Warner (1963), to Sandy (1976), and Lutz (1978), suggests that pluralism is operated in education so as to advantage some groups to the distinct disadvantage of others. The extent that the inequities change, one time advantaging one group and another time a different group, may be accounted for more by a change in coalitions and political influence than by changing needs or goals in public education.

Method

Questionnaire and ethnographic methods were employed in gathering the data for this paper. Whitehill (1976) surveyed the total 1972-73 membership in State House and Senate in Pennsylvania. Responses were returned by 48% of the 50 members of the Senate and 29% of the 203 members of the House. A sample of 10% non-respondents was obtained demonstrating no bias in the original sample of respondents. The questionnaire obtained data from the elected representatives regarding their consideration of constituencies, influence groups, and lobbies, as well as party discipline influence and personal values as these determined their legislative decisions, particularly in education. Further, historic data were obtained regarding the fate of education bills to serve as a backdrop for the questionnaire data.

Hess (1980), using her role in the Pennsylvania Education Association, gathered data using the unobtrusive methods of personal logs, informal interviews, minutes of meetings, calendars, formal reports, and selected formal interviews. She developed a case study describing the process of influencing the legislature used by the Pennsylvania Education Association, purported at the time to be the most effective lobby in the Pennsylvania Legislature. In late 1980, Hess moved to the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators. Using these same methods, she developed case data about that organization's influence process and possible changes in the Pennsylvania Education Association's lobby that might be observed from the new vantage point. The Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators is generally held to be a usual antagonist of the Pennsylvania Education Association and much less powerful as a lobby.

Data

Masters, et al (1964) noted that for state legislators there was not much "political coinage" in education. This is to say that there is little to gain from a legislator's support of education bills. It is not to say that there is nothing to lose. No legislator can afford to be seen as anti-public schools. However, voting for large and expensive mandated education programs or being pro-education union can hurt a legislator at the polls. This appears to be amplified when it comes to a party developing a label of pro- or anti-public education.

The Survey Study

A questionnaire survey and study of education bills in Pennsylvania (1973-74) confirmed this perception. Forty-six percent of the combined respondents from the House and Senate thought education bills were treated as a-political or at least less political than other types of bills. Further, 77% of the combined chamber's respondents viewed education bills as "very important" because they affected more people than most other types of bill.

All respondents indicated that education interest groups were given consideration before legislators cast their votes on education bills, and 82% acknowledged giving those lobbies "great" consideration before casting their vote. All legislators indicated a range of "assets" a lobby may possess that affect the legislators' propensity to consider the lobby's position. The lobby's voting strength (at the polls) and their organization was cited by 35% of the pooled respondents. But the greatest asset a lobby can possess is expertise and knowledge. This was cited as a prime factor in the legislator's willingness

to listen to a lobby by 78% of the respondents, nearly twice as often as any other choice. The money the lobby had to spend was cited least of any suggested reasons for lobby influence, 11% of respondents.

Additional influence was acknowledged, by 95% of the respondents, for the education "experts" in the legislature; 100% said they were influenced by their constituents; and 95% said they were influenced by the report of the education committee.

It is interesting to note that only 63% indicated that the opinions of legislative staff influenced their votes. This would seem to be counter to data collected in our study of two actual lobbies, reported below. It should be recognized, however, that often the committee staff actually writes legislation and committee reports and that 95% of the respondents were influenced by the education committee's report about education bills. This certainly should be considered as a modifier of this 63% response.

Eighty percent of the respondents indicated they were influenced by their party's views about education bills "depending on the issue". The meaning of this is not clear, but one may speculate that when the party cares a lot, a legislator is influenced by that partisan view. Further, 84% reported that the views of committees, other than the education committee, did not influence them. This is interesting in light of the generally accepted viewpoint that "log rolling" occurs among committees either to get bills held in committee or reported out for a vote. As will be seen below, this process of committee assignments and reporting out was a major factor in the passage of education bills in Pennsylvania in 1973-74.

Chi Square analyses were done on all votes on education bills reported out of committee in the 1973-74 legislative session in Pennsylvania legislature, by party (Republican or Democrat) and by representation area (rural or urban). No significance was found in those analyses. One may conclude that there was no significance by party or by whether the legislators were urban or rural in their tendency to vote for or against education bills. Put another way, there were no Republican or Democratic education bills. Education bills are bi-partisan! Although it seemed more likely, neither were there urban or rural education bills in 1973-74, at least as determined by the voting record at final readings, the final floor vote on a bill.

Apparently support necessary for passage was required in order for a bill to come to final reading on the floor. This required, to a large measure, bi-partisan support. Once that was obtained, those legislators not required for passage could vote against a bill. Thus, all bills had the support of both parties and specific legislators occasionally voted against a specific bill, according to the dictates of their conscience or constituencies.

Very significant was the finding that the method of defeating an education bill did not involve defeat on the floor at final reading. Rather, the bill was held in committee, or reassigned to the appropriations committee, or sent back to the education committee. Education bills seem to die in committees. They are not defeated on the floor. The conclusion of the study states, "Education bills . . . do not become partisan issues to the legislators, and, therefore, they should not be lobbied as such" (Whitehill, 1976, p 162).

How then should education bills be lobbied? Based on the above findings, education interests (lobbies) are one important consideration for state

legislators in deciding how to vote. Additionally, hometown constituencies and hometown educators, particularly superintendents, are important sources of input to the legislator. The opinions of the legislative education committee are important (and through them the committee's staff). Finally, education bills apparently need the support of both sides of the aisle and legislators do not listen to lobbyists who are not considered to hold expertise in their area. Therefore, education lobbies should do the following:

1. Lobby both sides of the aisle (Republicans and Democrats).
2. Chairpersons of education and appropriation committees must be lobbied.
3. Good relationships (often personal) with the education and appropriation committees and their staff are essential.
4. Lobbies should work with grassroots, backhome constituencies, and school people.
5. Of prime importance is the perceived expertise of the lobby. All information provided must be relevant and correct. A lobbyist cannot afford to mislead a legislator if he/she wants to have the legislator listen again. Know what you're talking about and how it will affect the legislator's constituency.

The Field Study

From September, 1979 through January, 1980, Hess (1980) studied the lobbying process of education bills in the Pennsylvania legislature in the participant-observer role of Director of Professional Development of the Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA). At that time PSEA was considered "conclusively the most effective lobbying group in Harrisburg" (Inquirer, 1979, p 43). The

central focus of data collection was the participant's diary. This was supplemented by news releases, newspaper articles, minutes of meetings, inter- and intra-organizational memos, and unstructured interviews.

Following her stay at PSEA, Hess moved to the Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators (PASA) as full time lobbyist for that organization. Although PSEA and PASA are both professional education organizations, they are often seen as antagonists, one representing "labor" and the other representing "management". This provided an alternative perspective through which the lobbying process could be observed. From September, 1980 to October, 1981, Hess utilized the same participant-observer techniques to observe the process of lobbying education bills in the Pennsylvania legislature. Data from both perspectives are briefly summarized below.

PSEA

During 1979 and 1980, PSEA had some interesting relationships with certain individuals who had access to the legislative process. The Deputy Commission of Basic Education for the Education Department was a former PSEA president. A former PSEA legal counsel chaired the Public School Retirement Fund and an ex-president of PSEA served on the State Board of Education. Such avenues of friendly communication must be viewed as an asset to a lobby.

Substantiating the power of the PSEA lobby the minority floor leader of the House credited PSEA with obtaining the votes necessary to pass the state's budget (including the public education budget favored by PSEA). The Republican nominee for Governor in 1978 was running 32 percentage points behind the Democratic candidate when he was endorsed by PSEA. After winning the election by

more than 220,000 votes, he said in a speech to PSEA, "You did it." By 1982, however, after some power changes, the Governor was not so friendly to PSEA.

One event that occurred on November 19, 1979, illustrates the mercurial nature of power. On that date, then President Carter, called the president of PSEA to ask about the association's support in the coming campaign and assure her that Vice President Mondale would address the PSEA convention in Pittsburg. He did; they did; but Carter didn't (win the election)!

The sheer numbers of PSEA members who were registered voters, the fact that PSEA had supported and contributed to the campaigns of many winning state and national politicians (including the Governor and the President) gave PSEA some assets of power. The fact that they so publicly bragged about that power may have eventually worked to their disadvantage. One never sees a billboard proclaiming that big oil and banking interests elected any public officials. Those companies may remind the official, in subtle ways, but they do not proclaim to the less powerful public their own great power advantage. PSEA was vigorously assertive that they were responsible for electing public officials. This seemed to advantage them for a time but in the long run was resented, as will be seen, and worked to the PSEA disadvantage.

In exercising its power, PSEA had successfully backed numerous winners. Once challenged by the state's school board lobbyist for backing only Democrats, the PSEA lobbyist responded, "We don't back Democrats or Republicans; we back winners." Whether by design or by chance, that statement was descriptive. PSEA had backed both the Democratic president and the Republican governor.

In 1980, apparently displeased with some statements from a powerful Republican state senator, PSEA withdrew its endorsement and supported his Democratic

challenger. They also supported the Democratic national ticket and the state Democratic candidates for Attorney General, Treasurer, and Auditor General. The year 1980 was a bad one for the Democrats. The only major PSEA backed candidate who won was the Auditor General. No longer could it be said that PSEA backed winners--they backed Democrats and the Democrats were out; the year 1981 was to be a bad one for PSEA.

Almost immediately the Republican Governor, who had won earlier with PSEA backing and proclaimed his gratitude to them for being elected, turned against them. PSEA countered by an attack on the Governor and the now Republican controlled legislature closed ranks with the Governor. A press release from the Governor's office said in part, " . . . when such an organization [PSEA] spawns a leadership clique which is more interested in developing personal political power for itself at the cost of all the state's citizens, the time has come for someone [the Governor] to stand up to them . . . it is the height of arrogance for any one person or group to suggest that they alone were responsible for the election of any official in our pluralistic society. The leaders of the PSEA insult me . . . and the voters of this state when they try to peddle this assertion . . . the fate of recent prominent PSEA-endorsed candidates . . . undermines [such a claim]" (Governor's Office Press Release 304-D81). The States' newspapers sided with the Governor and editorialized, "But power is nebulous . . . Somewhere along the line PSEA began to believe its own rhetoric, began believing it was mightier than the process it sought to influence" (Patriot News, Harrisburg, March 22, 1981).

Throughout the direct observation of PSEA, it was noted that they had been careful to know what was going on. They were the only education lobby to have

a representative present at State Board hearings on education bills. They worked carefully with their grassroots membership. They worked for consensus (particularly over the Education Code Revision bill when other education lobbies did not). They knew the facts and presented them and the PSEA position in an honest fashion. After one hearing, the President Pro Tempor of the House reported, "[PSEA] sent us continuous position papers, all well researched . . . They've already done their homework and now can sit back . . ." Other legislators commented at other times on "the professionalism, dependability, and credibility of [the PSEA lobby]; a good rapport with the General Assembly; open, frank, informative, and knowledgeable in educational matters; reliability of information; and operational propriety." Many of these attributes became assigned, in the minds of legislators, to the individuals who represented the PSEA.

In April, 1980, two of these trusted PSEA lobbyists were fired by PSEA. This brought a negative reaction from several top legislators and, as mentioned before, that reaction resulted in PSEA's withdrawing support from one who went on to win the election without PSEA support. In June, 1981, the Republican caucus found inconsistencies in PSEA data related to the education funding bill, after an agreement on its passage, in amended form, had been reached by both houses. This and the PSEA's battle with the Governor led to withdrawal of Republican support and, in addition, undermined PSEA's reputation for honesty.

Over an 18 month period PSEA violated four of the five principles stated earlier in this paper, principles they had previously worked hard to uphold.

1. By failing to support Republicans, and even withdrawing previously given support of certain Republicans, PSEA closed the doors of important Republican legislators to their lobbying efforts. Their attack

on the Governor further polarized the matter and it became difficult to lobby on both sides of the aisle.

2. Those same actions alienated top Republicans as they assumed chairmanships of important committees.
3. The firing of two well-liked lobbyists abrogated the good personal relationships they had established with legislators and committees.
4. The inaccurate data about the funding bill undermined legislative confidence in PSEA's integrity.

PASA

Made up only of school administrators, it is clear that PASA will never be able to boast of funds of over $160,000 to give to candidates or anywhere near the registered voters as PSEA has in its membership. They can, however, contend that they:

1. Represent "back home" grassroots experts on educational issues.
2. Have strong ties with the School Board Association (each board comprised of seven public officials elected in Pennsylvania on partisan tickets).
3. Employ a lobbyist (since 1981) who spends full time working at establishing good relationships with committees and key legislators.
4. Provide absolutely creditable and honest data on the political issues.

Particularly, PASA has concentrated during the last 18 months on committees, committee chairman, and key legislators. They have been very careful to be sure of data presented and they have utilized back home constituents for public

testimony. This strategy seems to have begun to pay off. Of particular importance was the reversal of the State Board's position and final passage of a funding bill for special education backed primarily by PASA.

It is not contended that these data indicate that PSEA is dead as an education lobby. It has too many members and too much money for that to happen. Nor will PASA, with its few members, ever become as prominent a lobby as PSEA was in 1979-80. The data do support the importance of lobbies and the process by which they become more or less effective.

Conclusions

The original list of five principles appears to be supported by the field observation. Two more can be added:

6. Lobbying is a full-time job if it is done correctly. One cannot effectively lobby a single bill. It is the legislature that must be lobbied and lobbied continuously. Only at that point does the lobby's position on a particular bill become important. Because of this continuous contact, individual lobbyists gain the respect of legislators and may assume considerable personal importance and stature which should not be assumed to belong to the organization.
7. A prideful, boastful lobby may be eventually viewed as a legislative bully. Quiet lobbying may be better in the long run than boastful lobbying.

If these principles seem too common sense oriented to be the result of research, consider that such may be an asset rather than an indictment. Too often research lacks common sense and becomes useless. If widely known before,

the history of education lobbies suggests that they have often ignored these principles. When such principles were stated before they generally lacked the data, other than common sense, to support them. If for once research supports common sense, I for one fail to see the harm in it.

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